



MADD

Activism | Victim Services | Education

Gallatin County Chapter
P.O. Box 11002
Bozeman, MT 59719-1002

March 19, 2007

Dear House Judiciary Committee:

On behalf of Mothers Against Drunk Driving, we strongly urge you to support Senate Bill 300, which will allow primary enforcement of seat belts in Montana.

There is no question that seat belts save lives. If everyone in the United States were properly restrained at all times over 6000 lives would be saved each year. However, Montana does not make it easy for law enforcement to ticket seat belt violations. Research estimates that approximately 135 people who were killed between 1995 and 2002 would have lived had we had a primary seat belt law.

Allowing law enforcement to enforce seat belt laws as a primary violation is an important step in increasing seat belt usage and thus saving lives. States that have enacted such a law have seen an 11% or higher increase in seat belt usage, along with a corresponding decrease in lost lives. In addition, crashes where people were not belted cost an estimated 55% more than those in which people were properly restrained. Considering that 85% of that cost is borne by society, we have a compelling interest in requiring citizens to wear their seat belts.

Primary seat belt law also helps law enforcement catch drunk drivers. We know that impaired drivers often do not wear their seat belts, or make sure their passengers are buckled-up. In fact, two-thirds of children killed in alcohol-related crashes are passengers in a vehicle driven by an impaired driver. And it has been shown that seat belt use for children decreases as the level of impairment of the driver goes up.

Furthermore, according to the 2005 Federal Highway Bill Reauthorization, if Montana passes and enacts a primary seat belt law, it would receive an incentive grant up to \$4,809,446 in extra highway safety funding – simply for passing a primary seat belt law in Montana.

I very much hope to hear that you have supported SB 300 during this legislative session. Thank you for your thoughtful consideration and please do not hesitate to contact me for more information.

Sincerely,

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